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REAPING
THE WHIRLWIND
AND OTHER POEMS

G. E. BRADBY



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REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

And other Poems

BY

G. F. BRADBY

AUTHOR OF "BROADLAND AND OTHER POEMS," "DICK," ETC.

LO N D O N

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE

1910

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REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

PROLOGUE

IN THE PLACE DE LA CONCORDE

WHEN the last red cloud has faded and the lamps begin
to glow,

Dotted through the splendid spaces, rank on rank and
row on row,

Nightly, from the gathering shadows troop the ghosts
of long ago.

Comes the roar of distant voices, heavily the tumbrils
creak,

One by one they mount the scaffold, man and maiden,
strong and weak,

—God ! what things the stones would utter if the stones
could only speak !

How they faced the awful moment—steadfast heart or failing eye,
Flashing scorn at the beholders, pleading to the brazen sky,
When the knell of doom was sounded and the hour had come to die.

Hapless Louis, dull and kindly, dying unenlightened yet,
Camille sighing broken-hearted, Danton striving to forget,
Charlotte Corday and the tragic eyes of Marie Antoinette.

Swift they come and swift they vanish—all the faces that we know—
Madame Roland sternly virtuous, silver tongue of Vergniaud,
Robespierre with his shattered visage, Hébert shrinking from the blow.

Some in anger, some in sorrow ; for the wrongs of endless years
Found a sudden voice that thundered desperate deeds to desperate fears,
—What could come from such a sowing, but the anguish and the tears !

Wise and foolish, false and faithful, here they stood and
looked their last !

France lay dumb in awe-struck wonder, all the nations
stared aghast,

When the reapers reaped the harvest and the whirlwind
roared and pass'd.

I

“MADAME A MAUVAIS TEMPS POUR
SON VOYAGE”

MUCH speculating at the Court of France,
And busy whispers in the gallery,
And nods and meaning smiles, and many a glance
That seems to say, “ I told you she would die ! ”
For, after sundry feints and false alarms,
(Alas the fleetingness of human charms !)
The Pompadour has really passed away ;
And all the wits are furbishing their arms,
And half the beauties count their beads and pray :
For who can guess
But that a glance, not coy nor overbold,
Yet seasoned with a spice of sauciness,
May strike a monarch, easily consoled
By friendly looks in moments of distress,
(Witness the favourite’s fabulous success !)
And force a passage to the hoard of gold.

For if a Poisson—(here we eye the glass)
Clever, it's true, and beautifully dressed,
But still a Poisson, of the middle class,
And somewhat overrated at her best—
If, as we said, a Poisson, why not We,
Who boast a rather longer pedigree,
With something quite uncommon in our crest ?
We make no boasting—but, who lives will see !

And while the courtiers babble, what does he,
The well-belovèd, in this hour of doom
That parts him, and for ever, from the side
Of her, the gay companion of his gloom,
The matchless paramour, whose smile could chase
The shadow from his face,
And teach the heavy-footed hours to glide
Less tediously, by witchery of her grace ?
The shallowest heart, at such an hour, finds room
For anguish that the years shall scarce erase,
And tears that drown the voice, while longing hands
Stretch in dumb misery towards the empty place.
Not so the well-belovèd's, as he stands
Vacantly gazing on the court below,
From where a shuttered balcony commands
The sable hearse and pageantry of woe,

Waiting the passive burden that we know ;
Until, at last, the lifted coffin brings
A sudden gleam across the jaded eyes,
The gloomy appetite for morbid things
That nobler natures conquer or despise.
And so the slow procession moves away ;
Then, with a languid glance at lowering skies,
That shroud the prospect in a pall of grey
And drench the drooping plumes, he does contrive,
Drumming his fingers on the glass, to say
“ Madame has wretched weather for her drive.”

MEMBERS OF THE THIRD ESTATE

HERE it is ! the bit of building—plastered wall and narrow gate ;

You might pass it, never guessing all it holds of France and fate ;

But it's where they used to enter—Members of the Third Estate.

For the King had sent a summons, cry for succour ; and they came

Duly to the place of meeting—“ Menus Plaisirs ” was its name—

Where the old *régime* lay dying, stricken with an open shame :

Mirabeau the many-minded, every mind a lion's roar ;
Robespierre with his pallid ravings, Bailly and a hundred more,

Barnave, Mounier and Lameth—all have entered by this door.

Can't you see them, tense and earnest, trooping down
the quiet lane,

Dwellers from the sunny vine-lands, men of mountain
and of plain?

Bretagne and Alsace had sent them, Normandy and
Aquitaine.

Sombre-suited, sober-visaged—not the stuff to take the
eye;

Dainty ladies at the palace laughed to see them trudging
by,

Fellows with outlandish faces, there to grapple with a lie.

And they grappled, with a purpose—stem demand and
quick retort;

King and Courtiers, growing restive, tried to cut the
matter short;

Barred the door—and got an answer, sharply, from the
Tennis-court.

Got an answer not expected ; yielded with becoming
grace.

Dainty ladies at the palace heard, and pulled a rueful
face ;

“ Surely some one ought to stop them, put them in their
proper place.”

“ Patience, ladies ! Something’s coming, something you must not reveal ;

Guns are rumbling, troops are marching that will bring them back to heel.”

But the “something,” when it happened, was the fall of the Bastille.

Then the work went swiftly forward ; and the old world, day by day,

Fell in pieces round the palace, where the fountains used to play,

And the masque with merry music danced the trivial hours away ;

Swiftly forward, never pausing ; till the vision of the few Proved the fact that all could cherish, as the fabric grew and grew ;

Such a passion spurred the builders to create the world anew.

Such an ardour in their hating, such a longing in their praise !

Every noble aspiration rounded with a golden phrase !

Europe gasped, and France applauded, eager for the coming days.

So they plunged into the future, battling in heroic mood,
Some to death and disappointment, some to write their
names in blood,
As the Revolution bore them headlong in a mighty flood.

And it's here they used to enter, crowding through the
narrow gate,
When the old world lay a-dying and the hour was big
with fate,
Men who marched to greet the morning, Members of
the Third Estate.

(The Chevalier de X. at Versailles to the Marquis de F. at les Eaux de Bourbon).

THIS letter, penned at midnight by the lamp,
Comes limping with lame wings to greet the friend
Too long a truant. And first, to render thanks
For what your generosity bestows,
The minted gold you pay me for my dross,
Your verses—polished, pointed, exquisite,
The purest Arcady, and surely mean
Your gout is mending. Next, to hint advice ;
Your peasants are grown restive ? Whose the fault !
Rousseau, my dear, is excellent in books,
(I've read him—own I find him rather dull
Who sniff at theory and worship fact),
But folly in practice. Ride them on the curb,
(My father's maxim, pithily expressed)
They'll like it and adore you ; give them rein,
And straight they'll caper—as your trouble proves ;
For inches have a trick of growing ells.

Then for your anxious questioning, what it means,
The news from Paris—city in a stir
And babble of strange happenings. What it means ?
A mountain, sir, in travail of a mouse ;
Or rather, just the custom of the hour.
You know our way, the passion for new things,
Now music, now a treatise, next a toy :
To-day the current craze is politics ;
And Paris, being ever hot of head,
Pushes the fashion to extremities,
Discusses constitutions in the streets,
Dubs itself Brutus, Cassius, Scipio,
Gapes wide at Ciceronian platitudes
And apes the Roman. Bless you, it will pass !
All passes. Therefore, set your soul at rest,
And bid your fellow-sufferers sleep o' nights ;
I, on the spot, using experienced eyes,
See further than your country wiseacres.

And, thirdly, for my budget of court news,
Lean as the harvest, barren as the times,
And undistinguished as Versailles itself,
Where, if one saunter forth, he's sure to meet,
At every turn, a mob of Deputies,
Important, self-sufficient, unabashed,
And talking with prodigious gravity
—Not unamusing ; but they give the streets

A petty flavour of the Provinces.
 But that's digression ; turn we to the court.
 The king grows every way except in grace,
 Seen rarely, mostly busy—at his forge !
 Whereof come sly grimaces, when fair lips
 Are pursed to kiss the hand of Majesty ;
 Such hands ! a sweep would boast a comelier pair ;
 They keep our wits in feather. But he makes
 Titantic progress if, as rumour says,
 He very nearly wrought (with sundry aids)
 A key that very nearly turns. The Queen
 Covets seclusion—probably a ruse
 To gain some credit from the Dauphin's death,
 A peevish child and scarcely worth the blaze
 That greeted his appearance ; but I hear
 His brother promises a longer stay.
 Monsieur still whistles for an heir ; the Count
 Still flirts with half a score of actresses.
 Then for a mild sensation ; Guercy saw
 —Swears that he saw, which rather makes one doubt—
 Your one-time Shepherdess, the Queen uncrowned,
 Madame du Barry, flitting through the park
 One vaporous night in May with—you know whom ;
 Disguised, of course, but unmistakable,
 Hence gossip wonders whether Luciennes
 Is less a prison, and report speaks true

Which credits half her jewels with the King.
As for myself, there's nothing worth your ears ;
A supper here and there ; peaches in May ;
Some luck at cards, which makes Corinna kind,
And disagreeable glances from the Duke.
Last week, a recrudescence of the pains
You wot of ; Mergy diagnoses gout ;
I hold with learned Bastot, who maintains
The blood is perishing through sheer ennui.
But where to find excitement ? Lend your aid.

And here my story closes, though I rack
Tired brains for matter. Stay ! I hear to-night,
But hurriedly, having weightier things on hand,
That, finding their accustomed session barred,
Some hot-heads, fanned by Bailly, said or did
Something bombastic in the Tennis Court,
Some swearing or declaring, if you please,
In flat defiance of His Majesty.
Details hereafter. Anyhow, it proves
My point : these fellows of the Third Estate
Will need a whipping ere they learn their place,
Speak modestly, vote money, and depart.

NOTE.—On June 20th, 1789, the Members of the Third Estate finding themselves shut out of their accustomed meeting place, adjourned to the Tennis Court and swore not to separate until they had given France a Constitution. This was the beginning of the Revolution.

THE LITTLE DAUPHIN

ONE face, out of the many faces
Barely glimpsed as we hurry on,
There, in the Château's lofty spaces,
And here in the little Trianon,
Splendid dames in their gilded frames,
And mighty monarchs bewigged and curled,
And Dukes and Lords with the sounding names
Who were far too great for the common world,
Till a sudden day, when a bolt was hurled
And the heavens grew red with a ghastly gleam,
And into the yawning gulf they thundered,
All the pride of the old *régime*—

One face haunts me, not to be banished,
Stabs the heart with a sad surmise ;
Painted, just when the laugh had vanished
Out of the troubled questioning eyes.
“ Be a king, not a meaner thing,
Who art Lord of France in the years to come,
Like the glorious Louis, the poets sing,
Whose frown would have struck a rebellion dumb,

When, with clatter of arms and rattle of drum,
He shone on his people bending low."
So they spoke to the little Dauphin,
So they spoke to him long ago.

And the Dauphin lifted his head and tried,
Like the glorious Louis of high renown,
To look the look of majestic pride
That can strike a rebellious people down ;
But, instead of the blaze, came the wistful gaze,
And the gentle smile that was half a sigh,
Which only the gentle soul obeys,
Not the red-capped rabble who shout and cry ;
And the wistful gaze, will it catch your eye,
In the quiet room with the ghostly white
Looking on to the pleasant gardens
Half in shadow and half in light ?

For the little Dauphin is always dreaming,
Since clouds came over his sky serene,
Of angry eyes and of voices screaming,
He knows not what, at a wounded queen ;
And a sudden flight in the dead of night
From a something fearful beyond all fears,
And passionate arms that clasp him tight,
And cheeks grown wet with a mother's tears,

And whispered threats that he overhears,
And horrid sights he is sure to see,
When the Paris mob for its Sunday pleasure
Comes to stare at the Tuilleries.

Such a brazen stare ! and he wonders sadly,
If "to-day will always be yesterday,"
For himself, he knows, he would go so gladly,
No matter where, to be far away
From the tramp of feet in the distant street
And the clanging bells and the threatening roar ;
Away to a pleasant safe retreat,
Some castle built on a distant shore,
Where life will be as it was before,
And each day dawn as a welcome friend ;
For the little Dauphin is often frightened,
And sometimes asks, "Will it never end ?"

It will end, ah ! yes ! but the way it ended
Perhaps it were better to leave untold,
How, cowed and crippled and undefended,
They let you die in the dark and cold ;
And the long, long nights when the moon had set,
And the room where you never saw the sun,
And worse things yet, we would fain forget
For the world's good name, that were said and done

Ere God had pity where man had none.
And for this, and other, that then befell
May God's curse follow you, Simon the Cordwainer,
God's curse follow you down to Hell !

For of all the crimes that have marred the mood
Of a people, stirred to be great and free,
From the walls of the Abbaye, splashed with blood,
To the doom of the Conciergerie,
The senseless spite, that could warp and blight
A poor child's soul with a nameless dread
In the prison gloom and the horror of night,
Is the vilest thing that the world has read.
Well, the book is closed and the dead are dead,
And France is free and the years roll on ;
But the price was paid by the little Dauphin,
Hanging here in the Trianon.

MARAT'S SISTER.

SIR, I knew Marat, once the People's Friend,
Now of all the names the hatefulest ; and received
Much kindness at his hands, poorly repaid,
At risk of your displeasure, when I own
A debt of gratitude, in altered times,
To one whose memory seems anathema.
And when he fell, "martyred" we styled it then,
—A woman's hate forestalling Robespierre's guile—
I was with those that went to see her die,
Your heroine, expecting, as you guess,
Something betwixt a tigress and a snake,
Whose fury had wrought such dire calamity.
But when she came, so simple and so calm,
A girlish figure with the candid brow
You worship in her picture, and a look,
Your picture does not give, of something seen
Far off, beyond the barriers of the world,
Revenge was lost in wonder, and a voice
Whispered about my heart, grown sudden cold,
That ancient whisper, "Do we kill a saint ? "

How could I doubt? Well, sir, there's something strange
In finding that your tigress has turned dove ;
And strange thoughts, like strange faces, rarely meet
A ready welcome in the brain. Besides,
When all that is most womanly conspires
With hate, that branded Cain a murderer,
To slay your benefactor, thought grows faint,
Old landmarks vanish, and the puzzled eyes
Scarce trace where Heaven has ended, Hell begun.
Hence came my questioning which has moved your ire.
But this at least I knew, that, as she died,
So died of old the martyrs, with the same
Calm grandeur on their brow, and in their eyes
The look, your picture lacks, of something seen
Far off, beyond the barriers of the world.

So, on the valiant head that dared and died
Unflinching, undismayed, with reverent hand
I lay the laurel ; but the aureole
I keep for one whose faith, more fiercely tried
By pangs more fiery, quailed not nor was quenched
Through forty years of scorn and obloquy
Or measureless oblivion worse than death,
For Marat's sister. Here's her miniature
To match your portrait. Oh ! I grant you, sir,
There's nothing superhuman in the face,
Nothing that awes : *her* tragedy was played,

Not on the scaffold with the world to view,
But up five flights of stairs in a crowded street,
A garret, leprous walls, and paper strips
Glued on the gaping windows—Poverty
That ran the gamut of all forms of want
Till age and destitution welcomed death.
But had you seen with what a quiet pride
She bore the name which France, weary of praise
And sick with incense, vowed to infamy,
Or marked, when civic faction bred new broils,
With what deep longing in the earnest eyes,
That sought her brother's picture on the wall,
She sighed, "Were Marat here, all had been well,"
Yourself had pardoned much to her and him.
For, Sir, the faith, the love, the loyalty !
Not once through all those years, as stone by stone
Her old world crumbled, leaving solitude
Uncheered by voices and unlit by hope,
—Not once, I say, through all those years, to doubt
That what still gave a dignity to life
Was, to be Marat's sister—that I call
A glory brighter than the martyr's crown.
Therefore to Charlotte Corday, if you will,
I yield the victor's laurel and the praise
That honours daring ; but the aureole
Lies with the vanquished in her nameless grave.

TRIANON

OCTOBER 16TH, 1793

THE light winds laughed, and the lily smiled,
And a rose blushed red on a drooping spray,
When a queen came out with her royal child,
A queen and her child came out to play,
Like country-folk on a holiday.

Oh ! the queen was proud when she faced the crowd ;
But the mother danced with her merry son,
And laughter rang and the wild birds sang
All day in the little Trianon.

But the lily died while the year was young,
And the rose-leaves lie on the trampled floor, -
For the play is played, and the song is sung,
And mother and child, they will dance no more ;
They will never dance as they danced before.
And darkness falls on the empty halls,
For the lights are out and the guests are gone ;
And sorrow broods on the autumn woods
And the lawns of the little Trianon.

For in Paris city a queen fares forth,

A queen fares forth to her Calvary.

They have come from the South, they have come from
the North,

They are there to mock as she passes by ;

Ah ! God ! 'tis a terrible thing to die !

And the head is bowed, that was once so proud,

Where a crown has glittered and jewels shone ;

And the leaves are falling and no birds calling
To-day in the little Trianon.

* THE SEPTEMBRISEUR (1830)

No, I'll not join you in your enterprise.
But, never fear ! your secret's safe with me,
Whose youth was spent among conspirators
And, as you say, has seen some strenuous things
In times you call heroic, when the pulse
Beat with a fulness that to colder years
Seems half a dream, half miracle. Oh, Sirs,
Your very ardour is an icicle
To what we burned with, in the fiery days
When crowns and sceptres fed our crucible
And thrones were footstools. We were giants then,
And every drab attorney, who could spout
The current tags of crude philosophy
Or ill-digested Rousseau, deemed himself
A fitting tool, a wiser Richelieu,
To carve the old world to a proper shape.
Yes ! it was easy ! Windy platitudes

* Septembriseur, the name given to those who took part in the September massacres, 1792.

With deft allusion to the Rights of Man,
A swift decree abolishing the moon,
The stars, or what you will, that had no place
In the new scheme of life—and France was saved !
Saved 'mid the frantic cheering of the mob !
I was of those that saved her, swung my cap,
Shouted my young throat hoarse, looked sternly wise,
And dubbed me Cato, with a parrot cry,
“ *Delenda est Carthago !* ” As you guess,
Carthage was Louis, type of Tyranny,
The poor fat bourgeois whom we sent to die,
—The goose who, rightly handled, coaxed and fed,
Had laid the golden egg for which we longed.

Only, the old world has a stubborn way
Of disregarding words, and paying back
Your blows with interest. You slay the goose,
And, from its ashes, springs some obscene bird,
A Couthon or an Hébert, to perplex
Your calculations and confound your joy.
Slay that, and, sudden, from the blue there swoops
An eagle, who refuses to be slain
And tears you with his talons. Get him caged,
And straight a clamorous flock of alien fowl
Rushes the farmyard, where you pecked your grain,
And drives you into corners. I have tried

My hand at carving, seldom to my gain,
Till sour experiences have taught me this,
To let bad lie, for fear of making worse.
Besides, and here I prick a deeper vein,
When swords are out and blood grows clamorous,
Things may be done which, after, move regret.
Myself perhaps have certain memories,
Not vaunted to my children, of a day
That saw strange happenings in the Tuileries,
When I and others, sobered now by years,
Did what would be forgotten, if the mind
Were its own master. Anyhow, I'd wish
To end my days with no more ugly dreams
To mar the ending.

Let me tell you, sirs,
Of something that I happened on of late
Which left me thinking. In our street there lived
A little wizened man, with silver hair
And melancholy eyes. The gossips clacked
Of something dubious, clinging to his past,
That made him dread his fellows ; and, 'tis true,
He seldom gave a greeting, had no friends,
And seemed to shun a closer scrutiny.
But gossips build with straws, and, for my part,
I never heed their cackle. All I knew
Was, that his daughter kept the little shop

In which I rummage for forgotten lore,
Honest but dour, and that the man himself
Doted upon his grandchild. Hand in hand
I'd see them walking to the Luxembourg ;
There, while the child was playing with her friends,
The old man, sitting rigid on a bench,
Followed her every move with anxious eyes,
Like some old hen that worries for her chicks.
You see I notice trifles ; and this sight,
Often repeated, gave me for the man
A kindly feeling—nothing more pronounced,
But just a pleasure in his innocence,
That made me nod approval when we met.

Well, on a day, I missed him from his haunts,
And, putting questions in the proper place,
Discreetly, as befitted, learned of late
The poor soul had been ailing and 'twas thought
Would scarcely see the violets. But, one morn,
When April sunshine flooded all the town,
Behold him sitting at the door ! His hand,
Resting upon the grandchild's flaxen head,
Toyed with her curls, and, on his lips, a smile
Spoke of an inward happiness and peace,
Such as descends upon the darkening fields
On quiet autumn eves : when, suddenly,
An ill-conditioned urchin, slouching by,

Flung in his ear this word—"Septembreuse !"
Septembreuse ! Great God ! I never saw
A change so swift and awful, as that cry
Wrought in the face before me. With a moan
He raised an arm, as if to shield his brow
From some appalling vision ; and, in the act,
Fell dead upon the pavement at my feet.

ROBESPIERRE

How I saw Robespierre, when, a hunted thing,
A price upon my head, and fifty spies
Lurking to trap me, I defied them all,
Traversed the city at noon from end to end
And slept a night beneath the summer stars,
Lest, tracked by some keen watcher to my lair,
My doom should sentence those that harboured me,
—The oft-told story—you will hear again ?
Then draw your chairs about me, while old tears
Strangle the voice and old eyes dimly scan
The faded records of the memory.

"Twas in that hour of frenzy, when, at last,
Danton, aroused from slumber, posted home
From Arcis-on-the-Aube, his Capua,
To end the Terror and set Freedom free—
Too late, such treachery dogged his steps : but I,
Heeding a timely warning in the streets
From one, whose ample cloak and muffled voice
Barely concealed le Bas, escaped the net

They flung around us, vanished and lay hid.
Then for three months, after the lion died,
Bayed by the jackal, cozened by the fox,
—Oh, Danton, what a tragedy was thine!—
I kept the little chamber, that you know,
In the old house by the eastern barrier;
Three paces square, a finger touched the roof,
And one small window, whence I gazed at night,
—Only at night, for fear of prying eyes—
On Paris looming ominous in the dark,
Till the slow dawn brought back the lingering day,
The dull inaction, and the listening ears
That strained to catch, far off, far off, the tread
Of feet approaching and the click of steel
That meant the Conciergerie and death.

So wearily I brooded, cribbed and caged;
Till, from the brooding, grew so fierce a hate
Of him, the accursed tyrant, whose false hand
Had stained, had quenched in blood, the fairest light
That ever dawned on poor humanity,
That nothing in life was real but Robespierre;
His was the shadow flung across my dreams,
And ever, from the corners of the room,
At grey of dawn or dusk of sweltering eve,
The green eyes glinted and the thin lips moved

In mockery, and a purpose slowly formed,
Delirious as the buzzing in my brain
And fierce leap of the pulse, to seek him out,
At home, abroad, asleep—no matter where,
So I might find him living and afraid !
Once found, once faced, not all the swords of France
Should save him from the sudden panther spring
Or loose fierce fingers, gripping at his throat,
Till from the straining eyes the last wild look
Of terror died, and Danton was avenged !

Such was the purpose ; but it ripened slow
In limbs grown palsied and a brain made numb
With long seclusion. But, with Thermidor,
Desire, that smouldered in a world of dreams,
Flamed into action ; for the Heavens were charged
With coming thunder, and a fiery heat
Blazed like a furnace through the stricken town.
The very flies stopped buzzing, and the beams
Blistered and cracked beneath the burning roof
That baked me liked an oven. For two days
I lay and gasped for air ; but, on the third,
Something awoke within me, a resolve
—Or was it madness?—to fly forth, be free,
And put my dying manhood to the test.

I kept my counsel. But, when noon had wrought
A silence in the slumbering house, I rose,
Crept like a robber down the stairs, and passed
On tip-toe through the shop, where Marie slept
Above the counter, drawing heavy breath,
A coloured handkerchief—I see it yet—
Thrown o'er her buxom face to cheat the flies ;
And so into the street.

Oh ! it was good
Once more to feel the open, tread the stones,
Spite of the glare that dazzled blinking eyes
And danced in waves about me. Nothing stirred ;
The streets were empty ; not a soul to read
The warning on my brow. But, ere I reached
The heart of the city, where the pulse of life
Beat sluggishly in market and in square,
A faintness seized me and a weariness,
And, suddenly, the fire that urged me on
Sank into ashes, as I knew myself
Too weak for what I purposed, and too rash.
Not that the settled longing for revenge,
My daily, hourly comrade, failed me now ;
But prudence, long a stranger to my thoughts,
Spoke in commanding accents, bidding rest
And calm reflection, lest impetuous haste,

Driving me helpless to the tiger's lair,
Should prove me not the avenger but the dupe.
So with tired feet, aping a careless mien,
I sought my way through unfrequented streets
To the Champs Elysées, then a wilderness
Of trees and flowers and vowed to solitude.
There underneath a lime, whose scented boughs
Dappled the ground with mingled sun and shade,
I flung me on the scented grass to rest.
And, as I rested, pondering many things,
A deep sleep fell upon me, and the world,
Danton and Robespierre, vengeance and my wrongs,
Were all forgotten, while the pregnant hours
Rolled idly by, and slowly, inch by inch,
The shadows lengthened and the fiery sun
Stooped to the far horizon. But at length
The sound of voices, stealing through my dreams,
Above the rhythmic droning of the bees,
Quickened a drowsy instinct. With a start
I leapt to consciousness, sat up, and gazed
Wild-eyed around me, while a beating heart
Hammered its tocsin ; for the voice that broke
The stillness, with its unmelodious note,
Was his, was Robespierre's ! His too the form,
Meagre and trim, that speaks the shallow mind,
—The dancing-master's smug gentility.

Beside him walked a woman, whose dark eyes
Drank him like holy wine at Sacrament.
Scarcely he marked her. In his hand he held
A sheaf of wild-flowers, poppies and the like,
Culled from the meadows—Rousseau's legacy
That stamps the pastoral soul. But not of flowers
He reasoned nor of country sights and sounds,
But of the time when France, redeemed by blood,
And loving virtue as she loved herself,
Should enter glorious on the golden age ;
Each shepherd with his shepherdess attuned
To nature's harmony, living simple days
And lapped in law and universal love.
The words were trivial and the fancy staled ;
It was his eyes that held me. Something rapt
Shone in them, like a vision seen in pain,
—The martyr's yearning or the fanatic's—
Terribly stern and infinitely sad.
Just for a breathing-space his glance met mine, .
Nor changed its fixity nor seemed to read
The face it lit on, for his thoughts were far,
Lost in a realm of shadows. So he passed.

Where was the panther spring, the eager clutch
Round the false throat that doomed the best to die ?
'Twas not the woman, walking at his side
With silent worship on her homely brow,

That numbed my hand and paralysed resolve.
Something far other laid an icy spell
Upon me, blunting hatred to contempt.
Was it the anguish of a sudden thought,
That Heaven or Hell—for surely it were Hell—
Had spurned the travail of a hundred years
And mocked achievement with a barren jest ?
That France, our mother, pregnant with a hope
To kindle nations to the bounds of time,
Had groaned and laboured, only to bring forth
This trite, remorseless, cold futility ?
This was the Revolution, this the end
Of splendid longing and heroic deeds
Flung at the front of Tyranny in arms,
—A miserable pedant with his dream,
The pallid idol of a doting girl ?
Or was it that there breathed about the man
Something not human—less than flesh and blood—
That showed him for a moment as he was,
Half self-complacent mediocrity,
And half a devil dying of despair ?
Pity or horror, wonder or contempt
—I know not which, for it was all of these
And something more—held me his prisoner,
Powerless to stir a limb or vent a cry,
As, slowly, with that visionary gaze

And thin lips bleating monstrous platitudes,
He brushed beside me, faded, and was gone.

If it were God that stayed me in that hour,
As Marie holds, and partly I believe,
"Twas for a bloodier reckoning ; for the dawn
That found me wandering like a soul in pain
Led in the 9th of Thermidor. You know
The rest, that deathless epic—how the storm
Burst on him from the blue, and how he strove,
Daring the thunder, till a voice cried out,
" The blood of Danton chokes him !" It was so ;
The blood of Danton, not this hand of mine.

9

THE CONNOISSEUR

ARE they coming? Can you hear them? Are the tum-
brils on the way?

There are thousands round the scaffold who are waiting
for the play;

But to me the place of places is the Rue St. Honoré.

For they push you and they jostle all around the
guillotine,

And the riders on their horses come and thrust themselves
between,

And the killing's done so quickly that there's nothing to
be seen.

Just a figure silhouetted, then a scuffle and a thud,
And a sound of something dripping through the planking
to the mud;

And they're busy with another when you've hardly seen
the blood.

But it's different, when you're standing at the corner near
the bend
Where they take the final turning—That's the place for
thrills, my friend !
It's the moment of all moments, the beginning of the end.

For the stoutest heart will falter like the weakest, when
the wheel
Is coming round full circle. It's the "Ego" that must
feel ;
And Camille, when he passed me, wasn't thinking of
Lucille.

And you've time to watch them closely, every twitching
of the face,
With the horses going slowly, just before they mend the
pace.
When they've lumbered round the turning it becomes a
perfect race.

Yes, they show it, if you're looking. I've been studying
them now
Ever since the King rolled by me in his carriage, and
I vow
Never one has turned the corner but the sweat was on
his brow.

They may play it off with bluster or bravado, and
they do,
Like the Girondins who postured as a happy careless
crew ;
Oh ! the Girondins came singing—but the lips that sang
were blue.

And the Austrian—she was torpid, and they thought she
didn't care ;
For her eyes were fixed on nothing in a vacant, stony
stare,
Till I shouted something at her ; and she heard it, I can
swear.

Charlotte Corday—she came proudly and her head was
very high ;
You would think, so well she acted, she was all agog
to die ;
But she simply couldn't swallow. Sanson saw it—so did I.

These are trifles that escape you, if you hang about the
knife,
Little touches—you may scorn them—but they give the
picture life :
So I always bring my glasses : they're a present from
my wife.

H'st ! I think I hear them coming ! Yes, they're surely
on the way !

There's the fellow with the sword, who gives the thumps
before the play ;

And the stalls and pit and boxes are the Rue St. Honoré.

THE TERROR (from below)

“THE Terror?” Ah! I mind it! ’Twas the time
My mother had the swelling in her legs
That kept her crippled, till it ended her—
A kind of quinsy, only at the knee,
And drawing off her strength. Our doctor said
That, many as he’d tended, young and old,
He never saw a case that matched with hers
And never hoped to. Bigger than my fist
And twice as hard. She felt it first in March,
Or was it May?—an active woman too
That never had known illness. When it broke . . .

“The Terror?” Yes, that’s what I’m telling you;
I mind it well, for things were at the worst,
My mother with her legs, the money scarce,
And bread!—you’d hardly fling it to a dog.
My husband, he was mad on politics
And told me, only I’ve forgotten much,
Why it all happened. Jesu! how he’d rave,
Banging his fist upon the table there

With "Traitors!" "One and Indivisible!"
Till the plates rattled and the rafters shook.
It seems there was a great conspiracy,
—The nobles, Danton, and a dozen more
Whose names escape me—Robespierre was one,
Or did he save us?—anyhow he died—
To starve the people and to sell our land
To those that hated law and liberty.
My husband was for freedom—'twas his craze;
"Live free or perish!"—and he meant it, too!
Not to my dying day shall I forget
The sight he was when, black and streaked with blood,
His hair all matted and his coat in rags,
He burst into the room with "France is free!"
That day they stormed the palace. Little Jules
Fled shrieking to my arms; and I, in rage,
Cried out, "Great booby, go and wash yourself!
Making my kitchen filthy with your boots
And frightening the baby into fits!"
So off he went. He was a docile man
And tractable as any wife could wish,
Save when the fit was on him; then, poor soul,
He'd stamp about the floor and bang his fist
With "Traitors!" "One and Indivisible!"
What with my mother ill and Jules to tend
I had no time to argue: but I know

The Section honoured him, and, at the Club,
Few were his equals. More than once they came
Bringing him home in triumph to our doors,
With shouts of "Well said, Brutus!" "Death to Kings!"
Startling the street and waking up the child.

But clubs and speeches don't pay doctor's bills
And, as I told him many a time and oft,
You can't feed empty stomachs on a phrase.
Small good the Indivisible did us,
Save once—a paltry job some would have scorned,
But brought a trifle in. You know the clothes
In which the ci-devants were sent to die?
Well, everything, from kerchief down to hose,
Was saved and numbered for the sick and old
In hospitals, asylums, and the like.
All sorts there were, the finest of the fine
That any lady would be proud to wrap
About her body on a wedding day,
And some not worth the mending, common stuff
A servant wouldn't own for daily wear,
Odd stockings, skirts and petticoats in holes,
All, as I told you, for the sick and poor.
But first they needed washing. Stiff with blood
They came in baskets from the burying-place,
And sorted in a fashion. My good man,
Being honoured in the Section, and with friends

Able to speak a word for those they knew,
Put me among the washers, and I washed.

Those were the pleasant mornings, when the mist
Lay on the river, with a glint of sun
Piercing the grey and sucking at the dew—
Sure sign of heat ; Jules, sitting on the bank,
His great eyes fixed on nothing (for the child
Was thoughtful for his years and fond of dreams)
Or, from the baskets, building with his mates
A Tuileries, the rascals loved to storm ;
And thirty of us, in a busy row,
Plying the batlet, elbow-deep in suds,
And talking, as you know we women will.
Marie was one—the leather-seller's wife ;
Not all she should be, if the truth were told,
With those bold eyes, and bits of finery
That led to whispers ; but she had a tongue
Would make an angel smile. My brother said
To see her act was better than a play,
She had such spirits ! Dear ! you would have laughed
To hear her fancies ! Anything was grist ;
The under-linen of a ci-devant,
A shirt with ruffles, or a sock in holes,
And off she'd rattle, while the jest was flung
From mouth to mouth and bandied down the line
With bursts of laughter.

Well, it didn't last ;
Nothing, since I remember, ever did.
The clothes they sent us ceased with Thermidor ;
My mother died, after the swelling burst,
And my good man, with other of his friends,
Was snatched to prison, where he lay a month
In terror of his life. It seems his side
Was beaten and the others made them pay.
'Twas all the good *he* got from politics—
A docile man as any, in the house,
Ready to lend a hand and bear a load ;
But times were troubled, and men will be men.

II

AT THE COMITÉ DE SALUT PUBLIC

FINISHED the frenzied night, the tocsin's boom,
The clash of warring hatreds ! and the day,
Flooding the lofty spaces of the room,
Lit with remorseless glare the disarray
Of vanquished faction, hardly overborne
And palpitating from the desperate fray ;
But chiefly him, the tyrant, where he lay
Mangled and bleeding, with his collar torn.
No word he spoke ; but slowly rolled his eyes
This way and that, in silent questionings,
Seeking, nor finding, in a dull surprise,
The friendly greeting of familiar things,
The low white ceiling and the curtained bed, -
The trivial sights and sounds, the morning cries,
The ticking clock and footsteps overhead,
That filled his daily wakings. This and pain
Alone were real—all the rest a dream,
The uncertain throbbing of a troubled brain.
Only, when some one, kindled by a gleam
Of human pity, stooping, sought to raise

The fallen head, his lips were seen to stir ;
And, dropping to the speech of former days,
He murmured very softly, “Thank you, *sir.*”*
I think the Terror ended with that phrase.

* “Monsieur,” not “Citoyen.”

THE END OF THE TERROR

So from the gloomy Conciergerie
They haled him to the scaffold, him whose name,
Scrawled daily on the dreadful page, had doomed
Sore hearts to desolation. Slowly moved
The heavy tumbril through the streets, and loud,
Like some huge billow surging to the shore,
A shout of execration smote his ears,
The curse of mothers and the shriek of babes.
But he, like one who dreams with open eyes,
Gazed downwards, half in wonder, half in scorn,
A silent witness of such shapes and sounds
As crowd all night about a fever'd brain
Till dawn brings waking. Only, when he stood
Waiting his turn beneath the guillotine,
The dull thud of the heavy-leaded knife,
Breaking a sudden silence, wrung his brow
To one swift spasm of anguish, and dry lips
Framed to the awful whisper, "Is it death?"
Ere thought was quenched again in apathy.

So in a dream he died ; and, dead, they found,
Close pressed against his heart, a withered flower ;
By what hands gathered, on what summer fields
In days of innocence, no man could tell,
Or, knowing, cared not—only, it was there,
That unsung poem, which, in every soul,
No matter what fierce discords jar the brain,
Once, were it only once, for one brief hour,
Has stirred the chords of love and, stirring, breathed
A music into life, and mystery.

MISCELLANEOUS

THE BOOKWORM

THERE were books, books, books upon every wall
From the ceiling to the floor,
Books on the table, great and small,
And books above the door ;
And he turned the leaves with a tender care
And watched the volumes grow,
For life to him was his study chair
And a rare in-folio.

The children played in the neighbouring street
And men were born and died,
But he never heard the patter of feet
Nor marked when a mother cried ;
And the rising sun, and the setting sun,
And earth's great heritage,
He heeded not ; for the world was one,
To him, with the printed page.

The snowdrop tinkled its tiny bell
And the dandelion shone,
But his thoughts were far with the asphodel
In the vale of Helicon ;

And the thrush that sang in the twilight pale,
And the lark that filled the sky,
Were hardly heard for the nightingale
That had piped in Arcady.

Oh, books are good for the mind's increase,
And the world is more than home ;
And sweet are the songs of ancient Greece
And the lore of the men of Rome ;
But the soul has need of the kindly deed
And a heart to feel and prove,
And better still than the eyes that read
Are the eyes that see and love.

LOVE-IN-A-MIST

LOVE-IN-A-MIST, love-in-a-mist,
Eyes that have laughed, lips that have kissed,
Little flower with the lovely name,
Whisper me, when did you win the same?

“ Long ago when the world was young,
When hearts were high and the spirit strong,
When the woodland spoke and the stream flowed by
For the hearing ear and the seeing eye,
When the stars were lamps and the flowers were bells
And fairies danced in the haunted dells,
And shepherds sang of the field and flood
To folk that listened and understood.”

Love-in-a-mist, there is no more song,
For the flowers have tedious names and long.
The lamps are out, and the bells are dumb,
And nobody hears when the fairies come ;
For another age, in another mould,
Has bartered sight for the gift of gold,
And other folk possess the land,
Who neither love nor understand.

TO A ROSE TREE BLOSSOMING IN DECEMBER

WHY are you mocking with the thoughts of Spring
The chilly sunshine of a winter day?
The merriest thrush has long forgot to sing,
The latest leaf has withered to decay.

To youth belongs the fire of youth ; to age,
The sober ashes where no lightnings leap,
Hope without passion, and a heritage
Of silent memories broadening into sleep.

Fall with the falling leaf ; nor woo again
The spirit of the summer, lest you prove
—That sight that moves the scorn of gods and
men—
An old man hungering for youth and love.

A WAR MEMORIAL

THIS is their window, theirs who knew,
Nor grudged, the price of being brave;
To England and to duty true,
When duty meant a soldier's grave.

And well for us, if year by year
We fashion in these ancient walls
A breed of men not slow to hear
The summons, when their country calls !

But, oh ! lest glory stoop to pride,
May we remember, when we pray,
The noblest death was His who died
“Nec miles nec pro patria.”

FEBRUARY

LAST evening, from his solitary bush,
While all the garden shivered and the night
Gripped at the shrinking earth, I heard a thrush
Sing to himself a song of pure delight ;

Yet timidly, as doubtful to proclaim
Uncertain news with unaccustomed mouth.
But in the darkest hour, sudden, he came,
The spring, with lusty summons from the South,

Shaking the doors and buffeting the eaves ;
Impatient to discover and to slay
His ancient foe still lurking in the leaves
Of laurel clump and ivy : and to-day,

Whoever walks abroad, will find again
The brooks unharnessed and the world at ease,
Sunshine and shadow sweeping o'er the plain,
And February roaring in the trees.

MUSIC

FOR ever closed ! The adamantine gate
That clashes in my face,
Just when I seemed about to penetrate
Into the holiest place,
To learn the secret of before and after,
To reach the fountain of all tears and laughter
And gaze on life and fate.

Somewhere behind this flood of sound it lies,
Beyond the cataract's sweep,
Where, in a tumult of wild harmonies,
Deep calls and answers deep ;
Or the soft chords of memories returning
Breathe balm upon the soul's unuttered yearning
And sleep on weary eyes.

Somewhere behind the pain that seeks relief,
The moan of passionate things,
When the low murmur of an ancient grief
Comes wailing down the strings,

Or the relentless drum, alone, apart,
Beats the dull beat that strikes upon the heart
And batters at belief.

Could I but win it! Could I battle through
The mazes manifold,
With clearer vision following the clue
I sometimes almost hold!
Brain, ears, and heart, intent, till my endeavour
Were crowned with glory and I learned for ever
All that Beethoven knew.

Vain hope! For even as with soul elate,
Drunk with the joy of sound,
Forward I struggle, conqueror of fate,
On to the hallowed ground,
Just as I seem at last to touch the place
Where the light dawns—there clashes in my face
That adamantine gate!

AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

Not in the noisy traffic of the town
Where every huckster makes the name a boast,
Nor where the chancel claims him as its own
Wanders that mighty ghost ;

But here, where Avon's tranquil waters glide
By pleasant lawn and unfrequented wood,
And all the beauty of the country-side
Lies mirrored in the flood ;

Here, where the sunlight flits from tree to tree,
And the reeds rustle as some wild fowl moved,
Where time has lingered, and we love and see
The things he saw and loved.

Here peeps the antique root, the mossy stone
Still bears the imprint of a fairy tread ;
Here Jaques watched the stag, and Oberon
His midnight revels led.

Here, when the cuckoo calls, the banks are gay
With violets and pale cowslips, and beneath
Yon slanting willow poor Ophelia
Went singing to her death.

Here are the memories that stored his brain,
That lit the storms of passion with a smile,
And blended with the stern and tragic vein
The sweet and quiet style.

And hither, ere the torch had spent its flame
Or inspiration failed the master hand,
Calm and majestic, once again he came
To break the magic wand,

And speak his answer, wrung through stress and strife,
To that dread secret which the ages keep,
His strange sad answer, that “our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.”

ST. FRANCIS

GONE is the splendid vision ! Gone the grace
Of Heaven around us and celestial choirs !
And earth rolls sadly through a silent space
Of awful loneliness and dying fires.

Palace and altar crumble, stone by stone ;
No more the hermit, gazing to the sky,
Shall see Madonna seated on her throne,
Or catch the notes of angel minstrelsy.

Only, when evening lays its quiet spell
Across the Umbrian valleys, and the pines
Start into splendour, while some convent bell
Tinkles, far off, among the Apennines ;

There, by the woods and streams he loved of old,
Where high La Verna guards the winter snow,
Or where the dark oaks whisper in the fold
That scars the flank of bare Subasio,

The birds, his faithful flock, in service quaint
Sing to each other of the wondrous days,
When dear St. Francis, everybody's saint,
Passed like a blessing through the upland ways.

TO A NIGHTINGALE

How can they call thee sad, who, by the shore
Of Infant Tiber, 'neath the moon's pale gleam,
Hour after hour, in ecstasy, did'st pour
Thy liquid scherzo to the babbling stream !

Was it another strain that thrilled the wood
At Tempe and Colonus, when the day
Died mournfully ; and hast thou changed thy mood,
And did St. Francis teach thee to be gay ?

Are Itys and the tale of ancient wrong
At last forgotten ? This at least I know,
No sorrow tuned the voice that all night long
Sang at Pieve Santo Stefano.

UMBRIA

SCENTED blossom and nightingales,
And streams that ripple through flowering vales,
 And the smile of a sun-lit land !
But ever, amid the scent and blooms,
The cypress tree with its sombre plumes
 Raises a warning hand.

All the rapture that spring can give !
It is good to love, it is joy to live
 And to draw earth's resinous breath.
But, peasant child with the dreamy eyes,
Why do you sing, as the daylight dies,
 A song that is sad as death ?

FAREWELL TO THE BROADS

FAREWELL, the peace of other days
That brooded o'er the summer meadows !
Farewell, the quiet waterways,
The dreamy mills, the purple shadows,
The far expanse of sun and sky,
The music of the waving rushes,
The plover's melancholy cry,
The willows and the alder bushes !

Once more, before the ruthless hand
Of vulgar wealth and city riot,
The country gods forsake their land,
Scared from their haunts of ancient quiet ;
Steamer and launches hoot their doom,
Stroke follows stroke with swift decision,
And, where the bittern used to boom,
The bungalow affronts the vision.

Oh, land, where every hour was blest,
From dawn, when first the aspens quiver,
Till the slow sunset in the west
Burned crimson on the sliding river,
Land of brown sails and lonely meres,
Of soaring larks and skimming swallows,
Where time had ended, and the years
Slept tranquil in the reedy hollows ;

Farewell ! Thy silence was thy charm.
Others may woo thee for thy prattle,
—The motor purring at the farm,
The gramophone's relentless rattle.
But we, who knew an earlier grace
Thine altered brow no more discovers,
Turn sadly, with averted face,
And leave thee to thy livelier lovers.

TRAGEDY

FINISHED ! The last leaf turned, the last knell tolled !
And I awake from that sad book to find
The world grown empty and the sunshine cold,
And dirges wailing in the summer wind.
Not though the blackbird from his wonted bough
Fills all the garden with a liquid praise ;
Not though the poppies blaze
Down the long border, and the evening glow
Clothes in rich pomp the crimson peonies,
Can sight or sound break through the chilling frost ;
So much they haunt me still, those pleading eyes,
The dear, sad eyes that I have loved and lost.

Not loved, not lost, not ever found ; and yet,
The spirit knows no bounds of time or place ;
Unbodied woes may work a keen regret,
And hearts beat faster for some gracious face
That never saw the sun nor drew a breath.
Not only life is real. Shakespeare's art
Peoples a world apart ;

Cordelia's doom and Desdemona's death
Are sorrows that endure beyond all years ;
And this sad story of a tragic wrong
Has dimmed my eyes with unaccustomed tears
And waked old yearnings that have slumbered long.

Unanswered yearnings for I know not what,
For things that might have been, yet cannot be ;
For friendship that should never be forgot,
For love that lasts, and does not ask to see,
Nor withers by neglect ; for still we crave,
The poor heart craves, that love, which is its best,
At least should bear the test
Of time and separation to the grave,
Not flung like foam against an iron shore
Nor changing as the waning moons have changed
—Ah, God ! the hands that clasp and meet no more,
The eyes that look and love, and grow estranged !—

Nor lent like wings to tempt a higher flight,
Discarded when we reach the loftier place.
Oh, cold perfection ! empty of delight !
Red with the murder of the soul's one grace,
Human affection, proved and purified !
What has the world to offer in its stead ?
Better, by far, be dead

Than thus attain redemption!—So she died,
And life became a longing. Fate is blind;
Blind? nay, but cruel. Well, the tale is told,
The last knell sounded, and I wake to find
The world grown empty and the sunshine cold.

LAY SERMONS

“I WILL HAVE MERCY AND NOT
SACRIFICE.”

EMANUEL Brown, first Baron of Trevose,
Founded and owned the great distillery
Of Brown and Berrison, whose famous brands
Are household words, wherever children die
Untimely and pale mothers dread the dawn.
Himself, best known as a philanthropist,
Endowed a chair of clinical research,
Built two enormous churches in the slums,
Enlarged a hospital, restored a cross,
Furnished a growing city with a park,
And gave a million pounds to charities.
So, decent, honoured, and aloof, he lived
His life, and, dying, died eternally.

Eliza Jane, the costermonger’s wife,
Of doubtful reputation, known to drink
When times were hard and comrades generous,
Was twice before the Bench for larceny,

Convicted once of brawling in the streets,
Coarse in her language, dreaded by the police,
But reckoned neighbourly among her friends
And trusted by the children, whom she slapped
And fed, in turn, with an impartial hand.
Religion never troubled her; but once,
Minding a neighbour's baby at her stall,
One bitter day, and noting that the brat
Was pinched with cold and shivering, she unpinned
The frowsy shawl that clung about her back
To wrap the baby warm. And, even so,
Unwittingly, she did it unto Christ
And saved her soul alive.

“NEITHER JEW NOR GENTILE.”

THE strange experience—call it what you will,
Hallucination, vision, or a dream,
Which left me wondering whether Christ be God,
Or I a Christian, happened as I tell.

You know my way of seeing out the year
—A supper party at some restaurant,
With boon companions and a flow of wine.
Well, just this once, having no taste for noise,
I chose a different plan and went to Church.
Yes, went to Church ; for, if the truth must out,
The slump in copper, and my partner's death,
Struck sudden in the summer of his life,
Had set me thinking gloomily. Besides,
With atheists rampant and the money'd class
Threatened with schemes of plunder by the mob,
Religion, ever buttressed on the Church,
Has special claims for personal support
On all the menaced. Anyhow, I went,

Meaning to be impressed. You know the fare
A midnight service yields—faint smell of oil,
And dim lamps dotted in the sombre aisles,
Slow music, solemn pauses, and the hush
Of expectation, while the muffled bell
Beats the twelve beats that knell the dying year ;
—Rather emotional, and better framed
For high-strung ladies, than a City man
Who boasts a level head and knows the world
A different place from what the parson dreams.
Still, as I said, Religion has its claims,
And I, as a believer, rate them high.
So, entering early with the worshippers,
I chose a modest seat beside the door
And knelt me down to pray ; not so absorbed
But that the rustle of a passing skirt
Would catch my ear, or tap of dainty feet,
Still, with a sober tendency to muse
On vital things. But, scarcely was the mood
Ripening to fervour, when beside me, plump,
Down sat a stranger. Ere I turned my head
Or glimpsed the horrid nose, my instinct cried,
“A Hebrew !” and my instinct shouted true.
You know, with me it’s something physical,
A kind of prickly feeling on the skin
And sense of sickness. Well, the fellow there

In greasy clothes, was of all types of Jew
The one that most inspires me with disgust,
—The red haired, pale faced German. With a snort
I rose, a trifle ostentatiously,
Gathered my hat and stick, and moved to where
An empty pew, the fifth from where I sat,
Offered asylum from the pestilence.
For, if in dealings of a business sort
A man must needs rub shoulders with the tribe,
So thick they swarm, at least they might respect
Our house of prayer and leave our God to us.
Such was my way of thinking—but not his ;
For, ere my blood had found its natural flow
Or brain resumed the interrupted thread
Of meditation, he had followed me,
Crept like some foul miasma down the aisle,
And there he sat beside me. Christ in Heaven !
Never did saint in battle for his soul
Face worse temptation ; and, a sinner, I
Could scarce control the hand that itched to seize
This alien by the scruff and fling him forth.
Still, with a forced composure, scarce betrayed
By curling lip and flash of passionate eye,
I rose, brushed past the intruder, found the door
And stalked into the night.

Thus far is fact,

Solid, indisputable ; but the rest
Is dreamlike, scarcely credible—and yet
It happened. As I paced the empty streets,
Glowing and sputtering with an inward fire,
Now planning letters to the press, and now
A league of all good Christians 'gainst the Jew,
Sudden, the sound of swiftly following feet
Out of the darkness checked me like a spell,
And chilled me with a dread presentiment
Of something strange and supernatural
Closing upon me. Dizzily I leaned
Against a wall, and, when I raised my brow,
The man I looked for gazed into my eyes,
The same but not the same : the type remained,
—That type that sets me shuddering ; and yet
Something of sadness, something too of scorn,
Mingled with pity, had transformed the face
And awed me, till I whispered, “Here am I ;
What will you ?” And he answered, “I am Christ
Whom thou despisest, and long years ago
I preached, a Jew to Jews, in Galilee,
That Sermon on the Mount that ye abhor.”
Then, ere I could ask further, he was gone.

“A Jew to Jews”—it's that that staggers me.

CAIAPHAS

“That seeing they might not see.”

You say we blunder'd through excess of zeal
Or lack of wisdom, giving to a cause,
Already moribund, a second birth,
Another starting point, from which it grows
In unexpected places to our shame.
Ah, well! 'Tis easy, looking at a past
Where elemental passions had their play,
To criticise the actors and to show
This one lacked judgment, that one failed to grasp
The consequences of a policy,
Obvious to you who see them realised,
But hidden once or dubious. I admit
The Galilean's star was on the wane,
Before we struck the blow which should have proved
His last undoing; and the wisest heads,
(Amongst the which I dare to count my own)
Had it been possible, would fain have left
The issue to Jehovah and to time.

“ Had it been possible ”—but there we touch
The crucial question ; for our hands were forced,
Not by the rabble, as you seem to hint,
But by the folly of the man himself
At the supremest crisis, by a word
Which, never uttered, had left action free,
But, spoken, fired a mine which none could quench :
As you yourself, when you have heard the facts
Dispassionately stated, shall confess.

And first to note essentials—here’s a man
Styling himself a prophet, who attacks
Established usage and authority,
(The prophet’s way !) sneers at your competence
To speak for God, flouts you in argument,
And saps the basis of society
By reckless exaltation of the poor
And gross laudation of the ignorant,
Who, ever quick to snatch at discontent,
Finding a champion, rally to his side
And grow impertinent. Your remedy
Of throwing all the burden of disproof
On God or time, leaves one thing out of view ;
—Authority must act or cease to be,
And, challenged openly, by one who wields
A growing influence, dares not let the cause
Go by default. I say it has to act ;

Not in a panic, which is worse than naught,
But soberly, applying means to ends,
And working on a reasoned plan. So I,
When first the danger grew in Galilee,
Sent certain men, well fitted for the task,
To watch, inquire, and, in due time, expose
Pretensions which had duped the multitude.
Nor wholly vain their labour: it is true
Ignorance has a cunning of its own,
And this same Jesus showed a certain skill
In parrying thrusts and paying back in kind.
Still, something was achieved; the cooler heads
Finding support for doubts, before concealed,
Grew openly contemptuous; and, you know,
A shrug, a scornful lifting of the brow
From men who carry weight, does more to quench
The fire of expectation in a crowd
Than closest argument—"A prophet? Well,
But where's his sign? A man of God? Then, why
This motley rout of doubtful characters
That dog his footsteps?" Yes, the method worked!
The crowds began to dwindle, and whole towns,
Delirious once, grew chilly, or declined
To something more pronounced than apathy.
A little patience, and I dared to hope
The prophet and his preaching would collapse

Like a pricked bubble, or, at worst, drag on
With lessening credit, till the world forgot
It ever had been startled.

Then there came
The unexpected. Nor can I be held
Justly to blame for failure to foresee
The incalculable move ; for who could dream
That, hunted from his lair, the Nazarene
Would dare to storm the stronghold of his foe
And plant his banner in Jerusalem ?
That sudden entry found us unprepared
And powerless to reply. The time, the place,
The ass's foal, the Galilean crowd,
Their hopes rekindled, shouting at his heels
“ Hosanna ! ”—hailing him as David's son—
All boded danger of the deepest kind.
For what if, at that moment, he had claimed
Messiahship, and, beckoning to the mob,
Agape with wonder and expectancy,
Had led against the Roman ! What if they,
Catching the spark and bursting into flame,
Had rushed to desperate and untimely deeds !
That was a dread that hovered through my dreams ;
For, thwarting, we had risked our lives and fame,
And, following but not guiding, we had proved
The sport of forces sweeping us along

To sure destruction and catastrophe.

Well, as you know, he chose a middle course,
Hinted at much, but shunned the crowning act
His entry seemed to shadow, and spent in words
The power which action might have multiplied.
Meanwhile I held my hand, content to watch,
Nor risk through violence the fatal brawl
(For still the rabble hung upon his words)
Which would have drawn the legions from their tower,
Till chance or some false movement of his own
Gave me the opportunity to strike.
For, this I was resolved, that not again
Must peril so tremendous stalk unchained
About our world and menace us with woe.
I had my plan ; but those were anxious hours
Whilst daily in the Temple, like a king,
He gave new laws and held us up to scorn,
—“Hypocrites, liars, whited sepulchres,
Slayers of prophets !”—Scarcely can I blame
The hot-heads of our party, who beset
My path with cries for action, and denounced
My statesmanship as base timidity ;
Nor, till the net had closed, could I draw breath.
For what if Judas had proved doubly false,
Taken our silver and forewarned his friend !
Or what if Jesus, growing sudden wise

And scenting danger in our apathy,
Had slipped away before the hour was ripe,
Once more beyond our grasp, once more unscathed !

Such were the doubts that racked me, as I paced
Restlessly to and fro that fateful night,
Counting the moments, while the die was cast
That proved me worthiest of leadership
Or foolishest of schemers ; till, at last,
Breathless he came, my messenger, and gasped,
" Safe ! he is taken, and without a blow ! "

That was an hour of triumph ! Oh, the stroke
Was bold, yet cautious ; bold, because delay
Had risked so much ; cautious, because the gain
Outbalanced all the risk. How could I guess
That, tricked, betrayed, unfriended and alone,
Faced by the splendour of authority,
The man would dare, before the Sanhedrin,
To claim a title which applauding crowds
Had thrust within his grasp, and thrust in vain ?

Meanwhile my course was clear ; nor did it seem
An arduous task, to one of my resource,
To force him, step by step, to disavow
Publicly, fully, irretrievably,
All the pretensions, vaguely hinted at,
Which made him to be feared. " Art thou the Christ ?
(Of course he'd answer no—how otherwise ?)

Then what?" Until, confounded and exposed,
We cast him forth, with no more power to harm,
Self-branded an impostor. So, alert
And certain of success, I took my seat,
Waiting the pregnant moment, with an eye
That marked beneath the fellow's outward calm
An inward trouble. First, by way of form,
This and that witness spoke of blasphemies,
Obscurely phrased, incapable of proof,
And little to the purpose, while he kept
A cautious silence. Then, the moment come,
I put the question which must seal his doom,
"Come, tell us once for all, art thou the Christ?"

You know his answer. Never in a life
Rich in experience, crowded with events
Of divers kinds, has aught so staggered me
As that inexplicable "Thou hast said."

Was it the gambler's throw, a desperate trick,
Ill-timed, ill-judged, for catching at support?
Or was he really mad, as some have said
And partly I believe? It matters not:
One thing was certain, by that fateful word
He shattered, past repair, the cunning web
My toil had woven, and let passions free
That brought new perils, new perplexities.
Well for our friends and us, that I was there,

Cool-headed, equal to the statesman's task !
Or those who shouted, " Stone him ! " had prevailed.
Then would have come the tumult that I feared,
The legions swooping, clash of swords, and blood,
—Their blood and ours—with direful consequence
To me and all who wield authority.
It was *my* tongue that tuned unwilling ears
To wiser counsels. Never doubt I felt
The odium of the deed—the spurious charge,
Patently false, (for what availed the true?)
That smacked so crudely of servility !
But of two dangers, presciently discerned,
I chose the lesser ; and, since naught but death
Could satisfy, that fatal answer given,
I held that death must bear the legal stamp,
The Roman fiat. One thing and only one,
Defied conjecture—Pilate's treachery.
That feigned reluctance to pronounce a doom,
Whereby he forced us, smiling in his beard,
To give our thoughts the lie, and blaze abroad
Our loyalty to Cæsar, was a stroke
That showed him cunning and implacable ;
Besides the opprobrious legend, which the cross
Bore to our deep dishonour. May the Lord
Require it at his hands ! Yet, spite of all,
—Of Pilate's botching, that set rumour free

And made an idle story plausible,
Of unforeseen occasions, which have lent
A moment's triumph to a beaten cause,
Were I this hour faced with the self-same knot,
I would not cut it otherwise. Besides,
When calmly judged, these followers of "the way"
Show less alarming than your fancy paints,
Poor and unlearned, publicans and slaves,
With not a man of note, since Stephen died,
To grace their number ; nay, perhaps they serve
A certain purpose, furnishing at need
A whetstone for the faith—a common prey
On which our youthful lions flesh their teeth
And grow to vigour. Even as you came,
There left me one whose star begins to shine,
Saul, a disciple of Gamaliel,
Ready in action, subtle in debate,
With letters for Damascus, to seek out
And bring in fetters to the Sanhedrin
Some folk we wot of ; scarcely would he heed
—Such zeal for extirpation burns the man—
My counsel to walk warily. Enough !
Take it from me who never clutch at straws,
This journey marks the healing of a sore
Too long neglected. Therefore, clear your brows
And eat with me the bread of cheerfulness.

THREE TYPES.

ONE man lived only for affairs ;
To him, the world was stocks and shares ;
And, gifted with a business brain,
He threw and added gain to gain ;
Nor ever lost, though great his store,
The passion for acquiring more.
Shrewdly he studied life and men
—Such life as passed within his ken—
Discerned their motives, learned the laws
Which seek, behind effect, a cause,
And, with profound conviction, said
That Christianity was dead.

A second, with a loftier mind,
Set out the truth of truth to find ;
Wrestled, in long and eager quest,
With codex, gloss, and palimpsest ;
Settled the text, and disinterred
Its utmost meaning from each word.

For him, who knew his deepest need
A fixed and esoteric creed,
The gospels were a point of view,
Christ, the possession of the few.

A third was filled with discontent
At life and his environment.
Unable to accept as good
A world that banished brotherhood,
He left the ledger and the pen
To labour for his fellow men ;
And, labouring, even in despair,
He found that Christ was everywhere.

MAN AND BIRD

I SAW a bird on a hawthorn tree;
It was sad, poor thing, as a bird can be ;
For its nest was robbed, and its mate was slain,
And it called her back, but it called in vain.
And I turned away with a careless word,
“ Well, Heaven be praised, I am not a bird ! ”

I met a man with a huge estate
Who was reckoned one of the wise and great ;
The big brain guided a clockwork heart,
And he bought his wife in the marriage mart ;
And, when she died, with a feigned regret
He wrote her off as a bad asset.

And now, of the two, I had rather be
That stricken bird on the hawthorn tree.

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